

Written Testimony of
Undersecretary W. David LeVasseur to the
Regional Efficiency Subcommittee of the legislative
Smart Growth Task Force
Thursday, September 4, 2008
10:00 am, Room 1E of the Legislative Office Building

Good morning, Representative Reynolds, Representative Candelora and Executive Director Paquette. Thank-you once again for the opportunity to submit testimony on how best to promote and encourage municipalities to use regional means to solve common issues, as well as to provide municipal services on a regional basis.

As I indicated in my previous testimony given to this subcommittee back on June 5th, regional voluntary cooperative efforts have a long history in the State of Connecticut with hundreds of examples spanning over the last several decades.

I would also be remiss if I did not point out the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has long encouraged municipalities to work together to use regional means to solve municipal challenges and to provide municipal services. Since 1984 OPM has participated as an active member on and has provided staffing for the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR). This is the body that authored the report entitled: ***Local Government Cooperative Ventures in Connecticut***, to which I alluded to my June 5th testimony. Further, since the date of my testimony, copies have been distributed to members of this subcommittee.

Also, in 2001 OPM proposed and championed the legislation (Public Act 01-117) that authorized two or more municipalities to jointly perform any function that a municipality may perform separately. That legislation was codified as Section 7-148cc of the Connecticut General Statutes and has provided the legal framework to expand the range of activities for inter-municipal cooperation.

Those regional voluntary cooperative efforts that have been the most successful and sustainable have had several things in common: they were entered into voluntarily; they were initiated by local leaders; they enjoy popular support; they save time, money or other resources and they use an entity or format that local municipal leaders know and trust.

It is incumbent on all of us at the local, regional and state levels to encourage municipalities to use the regional model to achieve efficiencies. Once of the best ways is to spotlight those efforts that have been successful over the long haul and encourage leaders at every level of government to share these efforts with their local constituencies so that the broader public discussion can begin throughout the State of Connecticut.

It is clear from the recent success of the Regional Performance Incentive grant Program, which distributed \$ 8,600,000 to eleven Regional Planning Organizations for a number of inter-municipal projects, that there is an appreciation and a need to use the regional cooperative approach to better promote these endeavors.

Accordingly, I would encourage the General Assembly to look at ways to further empower local municipal leaders to utilize existing statutes and regional relationships to provide even more municipal services on a regional basis.

You have asked for specific incentives to encourage additional regional efforts and while I agree that incentives are good, I would submit, that history has shown that regional efforts must either inherently produce savings or encourage a more intensive or expanded level of services if they are going to be successful and sustainable. Incentives alone are not sufficient to make these efforts successful. Having said that, the apparent success of the recent Regional Performance Incentive grant Program (RPIP), did help launch some efforts that we hope will be successful and sustainable for years to come.

History also suggests that the involvement of municipal chief elected officials is critical if these regional efforts are to succeed. Section 7 of Public Act, 08-182, passed last session, takes the first major step forward by requiring regional planning organizations to adopt by-laws that require the chief elected officials of their member communities to meet at least quarterly. Starting the dialogue among chief elected officials is one of the best ways to initiate the discussion of the need to use regional cooperative means to solve issues of municipal importance and to regionally provide a means for municipalities to more efficiently provide services to local taxpayers.

Finally, I would suggest that you ask state agencies to individually review their grant programs and identify which of their grants programs might be conducive to being distributed on a regional basis. This will become more

important as dedicated state funding to municipalities begins to be impacted by reduced federal assistance to both states and municipalities.

Once again, thank-you for the opportunity to provide written testimony here today and I look forward to working with you as you continue your fine work.

